

# StarTribune

## A legislative no-brainer: Pass state funds to finish project for the homeless

*Governing is hard work, but providing money for the new Dorothy Day Center should be easy.*

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May 27, 2016

<http://www.startribune.com/a-legislative-no-brainer-pass-state-funds-to-finish-project-for-the-homeless/381043141/>

Our elected state leaders work hard for little pay and govern in an increasingly complex environment. So when we ask them for support and state resources, it should be made as easy as possible whenever possible.

What should make something easy or at least easier?

- A demonstrated need, particularly for those most in need.
- Strong local support and a public-private partnership with significant “skin in the game.”
- A proven track record of successful results and a long history of state investments.
- An opportunity to push across the finish line something that is underway and making progress.
- Bipartisan and statewide support among legislators and from the governor.

The second phase of the new Dorothy Day Center — an Opportunity Center for job training, veterans’ services, financial services, physical and mental health, and more housing for those who have been homeless — satisfies each of these metrics.

The Dorothy Day Center provides hope and help to some of our most vulnerable residents, including veterans, the elderly, and people released from hospitals with nowhere else to go, as well as those who lost jobs during the Great Recession and are struggling to find work again in a changing job market. They need the support, and we need every one who can work to get back on the job.

When an overcrowded Dorothy Day Center began to turn people away in 2011, the community sprang into action. The city of St. Paul and Ramsey County are invested. Faith communities, neighborhood organizations and local businesses are supportive. A historic public-private partnership is being advanced, including a \$40 million private capital campaign, with just \$8 million more to go to meet its goal. Corporations, foundations and individuals are stretching — many giving more than ever before.

Minnesota has a long history of governors and legislators of both parties investing state funds for housing and supports for the homeless. These investments have continued because remarkable results have been demonstrated all over the state — people leading better lives and avoiding emergency and health care costs that burden all of us. One such project is Higher Ground Minneapolis, which opened in 2012. It is serving as the model for the first phase of the new Dorothy Day Center, Higher Ground St. Paul, which is already under construction and being financed with state general obligation and housing bonds.

But the shelter and housing to be provided at Higher Ground St. Paul is only half of the job. Without the services of the Opportunity Center and more housing, too many will be left behind. So we are seeking \$12 million in general obligation bonds and a statewide investment in housing bonds. We need to finish the job. And we are ready to keep the shovels digging and the hammers pounding without delay.

We are thankful for the significant statewide and bipartisan support that exists for these investments. Funding was in Gov. Mark Dayton's budget and in the bonding bill that passed both the Senate and the House. But somehow the job did not get done. A common cost of delay is money. A less common cost present here is delayed hope and opportunity for those who need it the most.

This should be easy.

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